The Green Party

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1 Introduction

The natural environment features strongly in the ways that New Zealanders think about New Zealand. A recurring idealisation of the natural landscape, what Bell calls the 'nature myth', is reflected outwards in the 'clean and green' image New Zealand presents to the world (Bell 1996). Does this collective idealisation of nature help to explain the long history of green politics in New Zealand? The 2014 general election marked 42 years of green party politics in New Zealand, spanning 15 general elections. It was also the second time that one in ten voters voted for the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand and the third consecutive election where the Green Party returned to parliament as the third largest party. The longevity and more recent electoral success of green party politics in New Zealand may in part be related to a strong environmental ethic in New Zealand; the Greens are much more than an environmental party.

Green parties challenge some of the conventional ways of understanding political parties. Ideology is crucial to understanding the Greens. This chapter explores the development of the Green Party from its activist roots and relates these activist origins to the ideology of the party. It describes how ideology is expressed in the party's unique approach to organisation and decision-making. In thinking about the success of the Greens, the chapter takes a broader perspective and looks beyond the recent electoral successes to consider what a party motivated by ideas can accomplish outside coalition deals and governing. Finally, it develops a frame to respond to a question that has recurred through their history: should the Greens just focus on environmental issues?

2 Party Origins and Development

The Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand officially formed in 1990, but the organizational and ideological origins of the party are typically traced back to 1972 with the formation of the New Zealand Values Party. The Values Party is considered the first green party internationally to have contested a national election. There are observable links between the two parties. For example, the Green Party's first co-leaders, Jeanette Fitzsimons and Rod Donald, were both active members of the Values Party in the 1970s (Dann 1999; Kay 2005). However, the link to the Values Party only reflects part of the story. The personal histories of the first Green MPs also reveal the importance of activism outside electoral politics, including in women's liberation, anti-nuclear protest, opposition to the Springbok tour, and rights for workers and the unemployed. The connection to activist movements sets the broader context for the emergence of the Values Party, other green parties worldwide and the Green Party in New Zealand.

The 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence and expression of new social movements in New Zealand, reflecting environmental issues, rights for women and Māori, homosexual law reform, and opposition to the Vietnam War, to apartheid in South Africa and to nuclear testing (Dann 2008, p. 180). These movements commonly shared the involvement and energy of young people and the rejection of prevailing ways of thinking about and engaging in politics. Dann argues that the concerns of these various groups were not represented by the two main political parties in New Zealand in this period. Although Values did not originate from one specific movement, there was immediate interest from a variety of groups after the party was launched in 1972 (Dann 1999). Indeed, a survey of Values Party members in 1973 revealed high levels of activism and membership in other social and political groups (Luff 1974). This activist involvement in the development of the Values Party influenced its structure and ideology and distinguished it as a new type of 'amateur-activist' political party (Lucardie & Rihoux 2008; Rihoux & Frankland 2008).

New Zealand's first-past-the-post (FPP) electoral system was not conducive to minor parties like Values gaining seats in parliament or sustaining voter support over time. Although Values contested elections from 1972 to 1987, its electoral success peaked in 1975 with 5.2 per cent of the vote. This support halved in 1978, which led to a party split and a decimation of the party membership (Dann 2008; Rainbow 2006).

After a decade of limited electoral success for the Values Party, a series of meetings began in 1989 to explore the formation of a green party in New Zealand. The Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand was launched in 1990. A 1991 survey of Green Party conference delegates indicated that 19 per cent

had previously been affiliated to Values, but the majority (59 per cent) had no previous party affiliation (Miller 1991). A large proportion of the party delegates were also members of 'cause' groups (44 per cent environmental, 12 per cent other causes) (Miller 1991). Like the Values Party, the Greens were formed by activists to pursue shared ideas.

Despite the constraints of FPP, the new Green Party achieved strong support at its first general election in 1990, winning 6.85 per cent of the party vote. These constraints encouraged the Greens to join other minor parties to form a coalition—the Alliance—from 1991 until 1997. The change to mixed member proportional (MMP) representation for the 1996 election immediately and directly benefited small parties (see Chapter 5.1). In 1996 under MMP the Alliance gained 13 seats, including three Green MPs. The ongoing participation of the Greens in the Alliance was questioned at the time and even led to the emergence of two short-lived rival green parties (Carroll et al. 2009, pp. 261–62). The Green Party voted to leave the Alliance in 1997 to contest the 1999 election on its own. MMP provided the opportunity for the Greens to contest future elections on their own terms without the ideological compromises and factionalism of the Alliance.

A 2008 study comparing green parties from around the world singled out MMP as a key driver of change for the New Zealand Green Party (Rihoux & Frankland 2008). Amateur-activist parties, such as green parties, typically have limited access to funding sources. But once elected under MMP, the Green Party in New Zealand gained access to much needed parliamentary resources, including salaried staff. Furthermore, each Green MP committed to donating 10 per cent of their gross salary to the party, providing a substantial funding source (Dann 2008). Although there may have been opportunities and pressures for the Greens to professionalise with their electoral success, activist energy has remained the driving force of the party (Dann 2008). However, as the party grows in parliamentary strength, there is potential for increasing tensions to develop between the resourced and professionalising parliamentary arm of the party, which provides a career path, and the wider party, which continues to rely on volunteers and activists (Rihoux & Frankland 2008).

From 1999 to 2014 voter support for the Green Party has risen steadily. The desire to increase support for the party has been a further motivation for change. Edwards and Lomax (2012) argue that there has been a concerted effort to reform the image of the party since the 2008 election, with the twin aims of increasing the Green vote and playing a role in government. This has met with some success (as discussed below). The factors perceived to be contributing to this include new co-leaders, the exit of the remaining MPs who were first elected in 1999 and the reform of messaging for the 2011 election campaign designed to appeal to a wider constituency and emphasise the Greens' economic competence (with slogans 'smart, green economy', 'green jobs', 'jobs, rivers, kids' and 'for a richer New Zealand') (Edwards & Lomax 2012, pp. 996–97). The Green Party vote increased substantially in 2011 and this support was maintained in 2014. However, with the desire for electoral acceptability comes the potential for conflict within the party over how to best represent green ideas.

3 Green Party Ideology

A political ideology is a set of political concepts or ideas understood in relation to each other. As a whole, these ideas influence people's understandings of the existing 'social and political arrangements and processes' and what these arrangements and processes ought to be like (Freeden 2003, p. 32). As such, a political ideology orients people to issues that deserve political action and prescribes ways of undertaking political action. This includes the kinds of public policy choices that are viewed as appropriate.

The activist roots of green parties matter; but it is ideology that makes green parties distinctive. It would be a mistake to reduce the core of green party ideology to purely environmental concerns. Although the environment might be the primary concern of some people who align with green parties, in practice the core ideological components of green parties worldwide generally include the following closely related ideas: 'primacy of ecology; respect for Others (nature, refugees, disabled people, women and so on); pluralism (multiculturalism), tolerance, social justice and participatory democracy' (Talshir 2002, p. 269). These ideas are reflected in the central ideological text of the New Zealand Greens, the Green Charter (Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand 2014), which dates back to the formation of the party in 1990 (Dann 1999).

The first principle of the charter, *ecological wisdom*, reflects the environmental ethic that a green party might be most commonly expected to promote. This principle establishes both an ethic of responsibility for sustaining the natural world and the necessity of doing this given the dependence of humans on the natural world. The second principle, *social responsibility*, emphasises the 'just distribution of social and natural resources' (Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand 2014). The third principle, *appropriate decision-making*, proposes an inclusive, participatory and democratic orientation to decisions. The final principle, *non-violence*, prescribes how the previous principles are to be achieved, through 'positive alternative ways of resolving conflicts' (Dann 1999, p. 25). These principles are shared with other green parties globally and are reflected in the practices of these parties (Bignell 2012; Browning 2012).

These charter principles guide the Green Party's policy stance on a wide range of issues beyond environmental concerns, from food labelling to preventative health care to peace and justice in foreign policy. But the other ideological components identified from green parties internationally (respect for others, pluralism, tolerance) also fit the New Zealand Greens. Analysis using the New Zealand Political Language Corpus (Ford et al. 2013) reveals that the Greens have been consistent advocates for human rights in parliament. The charter also acknowledges the unique status of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori. The Greens are considered 'as liberal on Māori issues as the Māori and Mana parties' (Godfery 2012, p. 279).

The Green Party's ideology should be understood in the broader context of a conflict between two dominant sets of ideas about the natural environment in New Zealand. This chapter began by pointing out the importance of the natural environment to New Zealand national identity (and see Chapter 1.4). This orientation to nature should be contrasted, however, with an equally relevant orientation: nature exists to be transformed and used. In colonial New Zealand, nature was transformed for personal gain and for the greater good of the nation (Bell 1996, pp. 36–37). These two orientations—a strong idealisation of the natural environment and a belief that nature is a resource to be used in economic production—can be illustrated by this statement from National Party Prime Minister John Key (2013):

> New Zealand's natural landscapes are part of what makes this country so special and unique. No matter where I am overseas people want to talk to me about how beautiful our scenery is. And when I get home and I'm travelling across New Zealand, I'm reminded of this almost daily. We've got an abundance of natural resources, the vast majority of which remain untouched. Our natural assets, both these picturesque landscapes and our resource base, are significant contributors to our competitive advantage.

There is an obvious tension between these two dominant orientations to nature. The intrinsic value of the natural environment implies that nature should be preserved and sustained. In contrast, the extrinsic value of natural resources implies that nature should be used in the pursuit of economic development and human progress. This tension is a concern for the Greens, as former co-leader Jeanette Fitzsimons argues: 'continued growth in the throughput of resources and energy is not possible; our current way of life is not sustainable; but life can still be good if we plan for a postgrowth economy' (Fitzsimons 2013, p. 2). Rather than just being 'for the environment', therefore, the Green Party takes a critical view of unlimited progress and economic growth, advocating principles of limited growth or low-impact green growth and responsibility to future generations and the planet.

Dann argues that it is these economic ideas that ideologically distinguish green parties from other parties; she says, 'The rejection of economic growth as a major focus and function of contemporary state-craft remains the original and abiding difference between Green politics and other forms of party politics' (1999, p. 31). Questioning of the relentless consumption of resources as the basis of economic growth underpins the Green Charter's principles of ecological wisdom and social responsibility, suggesting that 'unlimited material growth is impossible' within the constraints of a finite planet (Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand 2014). The Green Party argues that economic growth based on the overuse of natural resources is driving unsustainable climate change, environmental degradation, growing social inequality and poverty. The party even challenges the way that prosperity is understood and measured, advocating for a holistic approach that incorporates quality of life and human wellbeing.

The very existence of the Green Party can therefore be understood as an argument against the historical near-consensus on economic policy between the two major parties, National and Labour, that economic growth based on the unlimited use of New Zealand's natural resources is central to

supporting national prosperity. There is an inherent antagonism between the economics-as-usual of the main parties and Green Party ideas, which question dominant assumptions about economic progress and highlight the effects this has on the climate, social relations and wellbeing. The Greens' critique of economic growth challenges long-held expectations of what a government is there to do.

4 Party Organisation

The Green Party declares its commitment to appropriate decision-making in its charter; this is realised as a preference for making decisions collectively and by consensus, practices that were also important to the Values Party (Browning 2012, p. 27). The ideological preference for active participation in decentralised decision-making is crucial to understanding Green Party structure and organisation, and has been argued to set the Greens apart from other parties (Lucardie & Rihoux 2008). The New Zealand Greens demonstrate this commitment to active democracy in four ways: consensus decision-making; rules to prevent the consolidation of power; grassroots participation of
party members; and rules and processes to ensure gender balance and representation for Māori in decision-making.

According to the Green Party constitution, decisions at all levels of the party should be made by consensus, defined as 'the agreement of most participants, with dissenters and abstainers agreeing to recognise the majority opinion as being the decision' (Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand 2012, p. 10). There is a fallback option if consensus cannot be reached: a vote requires a 75 per cent majority to pass. Bignell describes one party member's practical commitment to consensus: 'we'll scratch and claw to get our consensus' (2012, p. 8).

The Green Party is also structured to devolve power away from individuals or units within the party by separating responsibilities and ensuring that lower-level organisational units of the party are represented in top-level decision-making processes. The three top-level decision-making units of the party separate out key responsibilities: the executive is responsible for the day-to-day and overall administration of the party; the caucus is responsible for 'parliamentary activities'; and the policy committee is responsible for developing policy (Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand 2012). Top-level leadership roles are shared, with male and female co-leaders, party co-convenors and policy co-convenors. Party members are restricted from occupying more than one leadership position at a time. Although the executive and the policy committee are expected to make decisions by consensus, where a vote is required votes are taken by representatives of the provincial units of the party. Representatives of local party units also have voting rights in the 'supreme body' of the party—the annual Green conference—which decides key directions for the party and elects party leadership. These features of the Green Party distribute and place checks on power, and provide mechanisms of accountability from the leadership to the base of the party.

The grassroots of the party—the members—have a variety of ways to participate directly in party processes. The most novel of these is the opportunity for members to initiate and provide feedback on policy development and vote on the order of the Green Party list. The Greens' website acts as a portal to allow members to be informed about and participate in party processes and policy development, and to connect with various networks in the party.

Balanced gender and other representation is also expected in key positions within the party. Green Party rules and processes ensure attention to representation for Māori, regional interests and males and females in the composition of the executive. This concern for representation is reflected in the selection and ordering of the candidates for the party list.

As activist grassroots organisations, green parties around the world have typically had to moderate their democratic organisational principles to accommodate the constraints of parliamentary processes, the challenges of working with other parties and the desire to build wider support (Carter 2007; Poguntke 2002; Rihoux & Frankland 2008). The New Zealand Greens have had to reorganize to account for the opportunities and constraints of electoral participation. The Greens, for example, initially did not even have leaders; instead they used elected spokespeople to represent the party publicly until the election of the first co-leaders in 1995. However, as the public representatives of the Greens, there are restrictions placed on the power that co-leaders exercise in party decision-making (Dann 2008).

Table 1: Green Party election results 1990 to 2014

Year	System	Party	Party vote (%)	Number of party votes	Change in party vote (%)	Total seats
1990	FPP	Green	6.85%	124,915		0
1993	FPP	Alliance	[18.21%]	[350,064]		[2] 0
1996	MMP	Alliance	[10.1%]	[209,347]		[13] 3
1999	MMP	Green	5.16%	106,560		7
2002	MMP	Green	7.00%	142,250	33.49%	9
2005	MMP	Green	5.30%	120,521	-15.28%	6
2008	MMP	Green	6.72%	157,613	30.78%	9
2011	MMP	Green	11.06%	247,372	56.95%	14
2014	MMP	Green	10.70%	257,359	4.04%	14

Note: the figures in brackets indicate Alliance results. There were 3 Green MPs in the 13-MP Alliance caucus in 1996.

5 Green Party Success

The Green Party's 2014 campaign focused on a 'cleaner, fairer, smarter New Zealand' and encouraged voters to 'love New Zealand' and party vote Green. At the end of its 2014 election campaign, the Green Party appeared confident of achieving the goal of 15 per cent of the party vote and returning more Green MPs to parliament (Turei 2014). Opinion polls throughout the campaign placed Green Party support consistently above the 11 per cent party vote achieved in 2011. However, on election night it became clear that the Greens would post a similar result to that of 2011. Once special votes were counted, the Green vote stood at 10.7 per cent: 14 Green MPs. The Green leadership may have been disappointed at this result and their opponents depicted this result as a failure, but this was the second double-digit result for the party. The total number of people voting Green increased from 2011 to 2014 by almost 10,000 votes, although the share of the party vote dropped due to the higher turnout for National and New Zealand First. The 2014 results should also be considered in the context of competition for media attention related to a series of allegations against the incumbent National Party. With the media focusing on these allegations and raising questions as to the credibility of National Party leader John Key for much of the campaign, media focus was largely off other parties and ideas, including the Green Party.

A closer look at Green Party support in 2014 shows that this increased in most urban areas and declined in most rural areas and regional centres. Party votes over 20 per cent were recorded for the Greens in the Rongotai, Dunedin North, Auckland Central and Mount Albert electorates, with 29.6 per cent voting Green in Wellington Central. The party has tended to do well in electorates like these that have proportionately larger populations of young, educated voters. The Green Party has increased its support in Māori electorates by over 200 per cent since 2008, regaining the support it lost when the Māori Party began contesting elections in 2005 (Wilson 2010).

Despite consistent electoral success since 1999, the Greens are yet to participate in a coalition government (see Chapter 6.1). Coalition deals offer some degree of influence in executive decisionmaking. A role in government can also permit a higher profile for party MPs and more power to control policy formation and to influence policy implementation through ministerial portfolios (Poguntke 2002). Although in 2011 and 2014 the Green Party stated a preference to participate in a Labour-led government, its record of support for Labour-led governments has not always been so harmonious. There have been contentious disagreements with Labour over policy and tensions within the practical working relationship (Bale & Bergman 2006b; Bale & Dann 2002). The Green Party supported Labour-led governments on confidence and supply in 1999 and 2002 and agreed to abstain on confidence and supply in 2005 (Bale & Bergman 2006a). In exchange for its support, Labour gave the Green Party some limited policy gains, access to ministers and the promise that it would be consulted on the direction of the government (Boston & Church 2003). The 2005 agreement with Labour allowed the Green Party a unique role, with government spokespersons on two key policy areas (Wilson 2010, p. 499); this concession is perhaps the closest the party has come to the powers

associated with a ministerial portfolio. A coalition requires willingness on the part of the Greens and the other parties negotiating agreements. Antagonism towards the Greens from New Zealand First, ACT, United Future, National and, at times, Labour has decreased the likelihood of a Green coalition deal to date.

Success for the Green Party, however, should be considered in broader terms than election results, office holding or even policy gains. Parliamentary representation allows the party both the legitimacy and the means through the media and parliament itself to spread the word, affect policies, frame issues and progress debates. Although the influence of green ideas on the public and other parties over time is difficult to assess, it is possible to observe Green Party attempts to put specific issues on the agenda. For example, Green MPs have the power to ask questions to ministers in the House and thereby to keep key issues, like climate change, on the agenda and to require the government to respond on the public record. Similarly, they can introduce members' Bills, which provoke the attention of the House and potentially the wider public (McGee 2005, p. 308; and see Chapter 6.4).

Outside parliament, the Greens' visibility has allowed the party to publicise and mobilise opposition to government policy. Since the election of the National government in 2008, the Greens have been prominent in public campaigns against mining in national parks, deep-sea oil drilling and asset sales. The Greens also have the opportunity for influence in local government, with significant Green representation on Wellington City Council and Greens-affiliated candidates standing in other local body elections.

6 Conclusion

After the 2014 general election, a number of commentators were quick to suggest that the Green Party should move to the centre of the political spectrum and focus on environmental rather than social justice concerns. According to critics, the Greens could wield more power and deliver more gains if their policies were closer to those of National and Labour. Ironically, the centre of the political spectrum is not meaningful for many greens who reject the traditional Left–Right ideological classifications (Browning 2012). The suggestion that the Green Party could pack up its policies and reposition itself is also a fundamental misunderstanding of the party. First, ideology is important to the party and distinguishes it from others. Second, activists, the base of the party, care about ideas and might focus their energy elsewhere if there was an ideological shift. Third, due to the decision-making practices, grassroots participation and organisational arrangements of the Green Party, major changes in direction are not straightforward. Fourth, the Green Party, which has promoted environmental concerns alongside concerns for social justice, has built a constituency of support across multiple elections. This suggests that a rival green party representing a 'thin environmentalism' (Hayward 2012) would most likely be as short-lived as were the Progressive Greens, who positioned themselves as an environmental party with orthodox economic views (Carroll et al. 2009, p. 261). They failed to mobilise support in the 1996 election and disbanded. Key leaders of the Progressive Greens went on to advocate for environmental issues within the National Party. Even if such a party could gain support, its continued viability would be challenged if one or both of the major parties took on its policies.

The 2008 global financial crisis and its aftermath initiated a re-evaluation of the dominant political and economic ideologies. In this context, new ideas matter. A political party like the Green Party that has forced marginalised ideas into public debate therefore matters too. Just as the Green Party challenges prevailing ideologies, it also challenges how political scientists understand parties. Implicit in the suggestion for the Green Party to shift its ideological positioning are the assumptions that parties are primarily motivated to maximise their votes, that political ideas are merely tools for parties to attract voters and that voters are closed-minded to new arguments. These assumptions potentially misunderstand green parties and voters. Rather than repositioning itself, the New Zealand Green Party may be able to reposition voters over time through the force of argument or it may be that in the long run, events (environmental disasters, climate change effects, resource shortages, financial crises) might reposition green ideas as more mainstream.

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